

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Craig Brown and Members of Council

CC: City Manager Office, Executive Leadership Team, City Attorney Office

FROM: Sally Bakko, Director of Policy and Governmental Relations

DATE: July 28, 2023

RE: Legislative Report: Austin and Washington Update

Please find below an update on legislative activities in Austin and Washington. (*To access links below, control+click on link.*)

Gulf Coast Protection District (GCPD) Update

GCPD Joins North Texas Commission Fly-In to Washington DC

In my role as Board Director with the Gulf Coast Protection District (GCPD), I joined GCPD Executive Director Nicole Sunstrum to participate in congressional meetings during the North Texas Commission Fly-In to Washington, D.C. For those not familiar, the North Texas Commission (NTC), NTC is similar to the Greater Houston Partnership. NTC is an organization of businesses and chambers of commerce across the broader Fort Worth-Dallas region. Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Texas Instruments, Toyota Motor North America, Inc., and the US Chamber of Commerce were among those who had government relations staff participating in the Fly-In.

GCPD's purpose for participating in the NTC DC Fly-In was two-fold: 1) educating companies (many of whom also have operations in other states) on the supply chain implications and protections provided by the Coastal Texas storm surge protection project and benefit to the entire state and nation; 2) briefing North Texas congressional delegation members on the Coastal Texas project – this isn't just a regional flood mitigation project, but a supply chain protection priority that benefits businesses and manufacturers in their districts. GCPD seeks to identify stakeholders across Texas and other states that could be organized to communicate support for the Coastal Texas project.

During our DC visit, we were able to meet with Senator John Cornyn, Rep. Randy Weber, Rep. Collin Allred, Rep. Jake Ellzey (also a House Appropriations Committee member), Rep. Pete Sessions, Rep. Marc Veasey, Rep. Keith Self, Rep. Beth Van Duyne, and Senator Ted Cruz. We also were able to meet with staff for Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Rep. Pat Fallon, and House Majority Leader Rep. Congressman Steve Scalise. While in DC, Nicole Sunstrum and I met with Katie Williams, Senate Appropriations Committee staff, and Theodore "Tab" Brown, Chief of Planning & Policy Division in the Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

A primary take-away from discussions with Congressional members and staff as well as USACE focused on the reluctance of Congress to appropriate funds for a mammoth project the size of Coastal Texas. A better strategy would be to break up the project in smaller digestible segments that could receive funding and produce tangible results. As such, a discussion point has been seeking funds for the

double-dune and expanded beach system along Bolivar and the west end of Galveston Island. The beach system could be considered the “low hanging fruit” that could be accomplished within a shorter timeframe (when compared to the gate systems) and appeal to the Senate Democrats and Biden Administration as a nature-based approach towards surge protection. For example, sand-sourcing and engineering for the beach system and the environment assessment for the gate system (the gate system being the economic engine of the project) could be in the first segment of funding. USACE Mr. Brown recommended GCPD work with the Wes Coleman, Director of Programs for the USACE Southwestern Division, and USACE Galveston District staff to identify and budget smaller packages for Coastal Texas.

Austin Update

Comptroller’s Broad Band Development (BDO) Office Update

▪ BDO Posts BOOT Applications Received

The Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) Program is Texas’ first competitive broadband grant program aimed at funding infrastructure projects that bring broadband access to end users in eligible areas of the state. Between April 3 and May 5, the Broadband Development Office (BDO) received 191 applications requesting more than \$180 million. Last week, the BDO notified applicants with overlapping project areas and encouraged them to work together on solving any redundancies. The BDO also [published applications received](#) on the Comptroller's website. This starts the 30-day timeline for any interested party to submit a challenge to one or more applications. The office created an [application challenge guide](#) to assist challengers in submitting the information needed. The last day to submit a challenge is Aug. 21. Details about the next steps can be found in the [BOOT Notice of Funding Availability](#) and on the [BOOT Program webpage](#).

▪ BDO Map Data Submission Period Begins in August

On Jan. 1, 2023, the BDO created the state’s first public-facing broadband availability map, which included a location fabric of all broadband serviceable locations in the state and indicates eligible vs. ineligible areas for financial assistance. Since then, new state legislation has changed how the map will display information. Moving forward, broadband serviceable locations depicted on the map will be identified as unserved, underserved or served. These designations allow BDO to make informed decisions on future funding opportunities for broadband infrastructure projects. To accurately map the state of broadband availability and display where service gaps exist, BDO will request updated internet access and service speed data directly from internet service providers (ISPs). Every ISP that provides service in Texas is encouraged to participate. Accurate and timely submission of data by ISPs is critical to directing infrastructure project funding to communities in need. BDO will contact state ISPs with further information by the end of August.

▪ Public Survey Deadline Extension

The BDO is extending the [Texas Digital Opportunity Public Survey](#) deadline to **Aug. 31** to better inform the state’s Digital Opportunity Plan due to NTIA in December. Additional data collected during this extended window is intended to ensure an inclusive Digital Opportunity Plan that addresses the barriers to accessing and using reliable, high-speed internet.

TWIA Board Considers Rate Increase Recommendations During August Meeting in Galveston

The Texas Windstorm Insurance Association (TWIA) Board of Directors will meet in Galveston to consider the Actuarial & Underwriting Committee recommendation of a rate increase for 2024 of 5

percent for residential policies and 8 percent for commercial policies. A [timeline of TWIA's 2023 annual rate filing consideration process](#) is available on TWIA's website. The TWIA Board will meet at the Tremont House in Galveston at 9:00 am, on Tuesday, August 8th. Members of the public are invited to provide public comment at the [Tremont House in Galveston](#) or virtually via [Zoom](#). Members of the public are invited to submit written comments via email at PublicComment@TWIA.org. Interested parties are encouraged to submit comments by **noon on Friday, August 4**, to enable the Board to receive and review them before the August 8 meeting.

Washington Update

Reminder - USDOT PROTECT Grant Applications Due August 18th

The US Department of Transportation is accepting applications for over \$7 billion in grant funding for the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program. The PROTECT program, funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, seeks to fund projects designed to ensure surface transportation resilience to natural hazards, such as climate change, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters. The PROTECT program will provide discretionary planning and Competitive Resilience Improvement Grants for surface transportation planning activities, resilience improvements, community resilience and evacuation routes, and at-risk coast infrastructure improvements. PROTECT grants may be awarded for transit, roadway, maritime, and bicycle and pedestrian-related projects. Funding-eligible activities include planning, construction, operations and maintenance, technology demonstrations and deployment, climate and sustainability, accessibility, and security. Find more information about the PROTECT program, eligibility, and the application process here and [here](#). PROTECT program applications must be submitted by **10:59 pm CDT on August 18, 2023**.

[Submitting for Competitive NOFOs: Understanding Best Practices and Pitfalls](#)

Join the US Department of Transportation for a hybrid grant writing workshop. **Wednesday, August 16, 11:00 AM ET** [Register Here »](#)

Reports of Interest

[Almost 6 million Texans live in a floodplain, state finds | The Texas Tribune](#), July 28, 2023

[Public Pension Funded Levels Improve Amidst Rising Interest Rates](#)

Center for Retirement Research at Boston College